

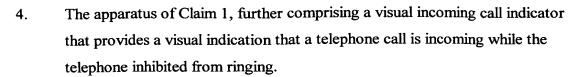
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CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

- 1. An apparatus for intercepting telephone calls on a telephone channel connected to a telephone, comprising:
 - a. a ring detector, in communication with the telephone channel, that is capable of detecting an incoming telephone call and that generates a ring signal upon detection of a incoming telephone call;
 - b. a user input that is capable of receiving an input from a user indicating that the user desires not to be called;
 - c. a counter, responsive to the user input, programmed to count a selected amount of time from assertion of the user input; and
 - d. a delay circuit, responsive to the counter, the ring signal and the user input, that is programmed to:
 - allow the telephone to ring if an incoming call has been detected and if more than the selected amount of time has passed since the user input was last asserted; and
 - ii. prevent the telephone from ringing if an incoming call has been detected and if less than the selected amount of time has passed since the user input was last asserted.
- 2. The apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising a telephone selection circuit, operatively coupled to a plurality of telephones, that includes a user input that indicates to the controller which of the plurality of telephones are to have ringing inhibited.
- 3. The apparatus of Claim 1, further comprising a message playback circuit, responsive to the controller, that plays a message to an incoming caller when the controller inhibits ringing of the telephone.





- 5. The apparatus of Claim 4, wherein the visual incoming call indicator comprises an indicator light.
- 6. The apparatus of Claim 4, wherein the visual incoming call indicator comprises:
 - a. a video display generator that generates an icon representing an incoming call; and
 - b. a video display circuit that superimposes the icon onto a video display.
- 7. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein the video display circuit comprises a text message generator.
- 8. The apparatus of Claim 6, wherein the video display circuit comprises a symbol generator.
- A method of intercepting telephone calls on a telephone channel connected to a telephone and a user input that indicates that a user desires not to be called, comprising the steps of:
 - a. detecting an incoming telephone call on the telephone channel;
 - b. generating a ring signal upon detection of a incoming telephone call;
 - c. determining if the user input has been asserted by the user; and
 - allowing the telephone to ring if an incoming call has been detected and
 if more than a selected amount of time has passed since the user input
 was last asserted; and
 - e. preventing the telephone from ringing if an incoming call has been detected and if less than the selected amount of time has passed since the user input was last asserted.



- 10. The method of Claim 9, wherein the determining step comprises sensing closing of a switch local to the telephone.
- 11. The method of Claim 9, wherein the determining step comprises sensing of a code entered on a keypad of the telephone.
- 12. The method of Claim 11, further comprising the step of determining a length of a delay during which ringing of the telephone is to be inhibited, the length being based on a selection of keys depressed on a telephone keypad..
- 13. The method of Claim 9, wherein the determining step is completed by a circuit that is integrated into the telephone.
- 14. The method of Claim 9, wherein the determining step is completed by a circuit controlled by a telephone exchange carrier.